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ABSTRACT

To better plan parent education programs for families from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, the Parent As a Teacher Inventory (PAAT) was used to identify similarities and differences among 114 Anglo-, Black- and Mexican-American mothers from upper, middle, and lower class intact homes in greater Phoenix, Arizona. Each of the subjects had a child enrolled at second-grade level in one of seven elementary school districts in the metropolitan area. Subjects' PAAT scores were analyzed by an analysis of variance. Where significance was found at .05 or less, the Scheffe-Test was performed to identify the source of significance. For subsets with significant variance, a Chi-square was employed to identify particular items responsible for variance among subjects. Findings identified significant differences among mothers as a function of ethnic background and/or socioeconomic level. Significant differences were found between Anglo and Black mothers on four of the five PAAT subsets and on the total PAAT; Anglo responses were found to be more consistent with the values promoted in child development research than were the responses of Blacks. Among socioeconomic groups, significant differences were found on all five PAAT subsets and on the total PAAT. (In tables throughout the text, global differences among parental groups are particularized in terms of specific behaviors program developers can use to help families of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.) (RH)

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PARENTAL BACKGROUND:

DOES IT MATTER IN PARENT EDUCATION?

by

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PARENTAL BACKGROUND: DOES IT MATTER IN PARENT EDUCATION?

A B S T R A C T

To better plan parent education programs for families from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, the Parent As A Teacher Inventory (PAAT) was utilized to identify similarities and differences among 114 Anglo, Black and Mexican-American mothers from upper, middle and lower class intact homes in greater Phoenix, Arizona. Subjects' PAAT scores were analyzed utilizing an analysis of variance. Where significance was found at .05 or less, the Scheffé-test was performed to identify the source of significance. For subsets with significant variance, a Chi-square was employed to identify particular items responsible for variance between subjects. Global differences between parental groups were converted into specific behaviors which program developers can use to help families of diverse ethnic and SES backgrounds.

PARENTAL BACKGROUND: DOES IT MATTER IN PARENT EDUCATION?

In planning parent education programs in areas with ethnic diversity, we begin with the basic assumption that parents from different backgrounds have different needs. To ignore these needs would be unwise for that would be to treat parental backgrounds as insignificant. Similarly, to design a parent program for one ethnic or socioeconomic group alone could alienate other parents so much that they would withdraw. Joffe (1977) found that differences in parental values and norms lead to conflict in child-care centers serving black low-income and white middle-income children. Neither can we continue to advocate separate programs for each group as we have done in the past. Such programs, despite helping parents better understand and accept their own backgrounds, do little to help those same parents to adapt to the larger multi-ethnic society they must live in. We manage to provide integrated school programs for children with as much consideration as possible given to their individual needs. We can do no less for their parents.

Integrating parental needs is somewhat more difficult than is planning curriculum for their children. According to Zimmer (1979), before a typology of child care can be developed that is sensitive to the varying expectations of different cultural groups, more research needs to be done on understanding parents' expectations. We cannot make the assumption that any group of parents are similar in their intellectual, emotional and social development as are children of a particular grade in school. What we can do as we make initial plans for a program to meet the needs of a multi-ethnic parent group is assess those needs in order that specific differences among ethnic groups can be better understood. This study of Anglo, Black and Mexican-American parents provides such a needs assessment.

METHOD

Subjects: The sample population consisted of 52 Anglo, 31 Black and 31 Mexican-American mothers. As seen in Table 1 these 114 mothers also represented 3 socioeconomic levels as determined by Hollingshead's Two-Factor Index of Social Position. (Hollingshead, 1957) The Anglo group included a higher proportion of upper-class and middle-class mothers. Each of the subjects had a child enrolled at second grade level in one of seven elementary school districts in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. Subjects were the natural mothers of the second-graders and all homes were intact.

TABLE 1

Description of Sample Members as a Function of Ethnic Background and Socioeconomic Level

Socioeconomic Level		Upper	Middle	Lower	Group Totals
Ethnic Background	Anglo-American	24	18	10	52
	Black-American	11	10	10	31
	Mexican-American	11	10	10	31
	Group Totals	46	38	30	114

Instruments: To assess maternal strengths and needs in child rearing, all subjects were administered the Parent As A Teacher Inventory. (Strom and Slaughter, 1978) The PAAT provides information regarding what mothers expect of their child, how they respond to interaction with their child, and what actions they take in response to specific child behavior. PAAT responses can be grouped into 5 areas of parental needs. Creativity, Frustration, Control, Play and Teaching-Learning.

The Creativity subset focuses upon parental acceptance of creative functioning in their child as well as their desire to encourage or suppress its development. The Frustration subset seeks to identify parent child-rearing frustration and the loci of this frustration. Parent feelings regarding the extent to which parental control of child behavior is necessary are dealt with in the Control subset. The Play subset assesses parental understanding of play and its influence on child development. On the final subset, Teaching-Learning, parental perception of their ability to facilitate the learning process of their child is measured. Ten items, designed to measure each of these five subsets, make a composite PAAT of 50 items.

Administration and Scoring: PAAT directions tell the respondents that they will be reading statements on feelings about their children and assure them that the inventory is not a test but rather a means to express their own feelings. Each PAAT item has four possible answers (strong yes, yes, no, strong no) which always appear in the same order. If they have no doubt about a statement, they are directed to circle strong yes or strong no. Otherwise they are asked to circle yes or no indicating the direction of their feelings concerning each of the 50 statements. There is no time limit.

The PAAT can be administered to either groups or individuals depending upon the context. Respondents usually read the statements themselves after directions are given, but in cases where the parental literacy level is low or parents are illiterate the items are presented orally or on tape.

Scoring consists of assigning a numerical value of 4, 3, 2 or 1 to each of the 50 responses, with the most desired responses assigned a value of 4. For example, the most desirable answer for item 5 (Much of my child's learning will take place before he enters school.) is strong yes, while the most desirable response in item 39 (It is difficult for me to stay

interested when playing with my child.) is strong no. Both responses would be valued 4. The PAAT Inventory is constructed with 27 items having strong no as the desired response and the remaining 23 having strong yes as the desired response. When large samples are used, it is recommended that Veldman's Testat program be used to score and reduce the scaled data. (Veldman, 1967)

Reliability and Validity: The PAAT was developed in 1972 by Robert Strom at Arizona State University, and comprehensive field-testing of the Form A of the PAAT was initiated in the fall of 1973 through the Research Department of the Tucson Public Schools in the ESEA Title I Parent and Child Education (PACE) project. (Slaughter, 1973-74) The PAAT was administered to 124 participating parents and surrogates of four-year-old children. The ethnic groups accounting for most of the sample were Mexican-American (69%), Yaqui and Papago Indian (20%) and Black (6%). Individual profiles were then utilized by teachers and instructional aides to implement the parent training program. In terms of language, 23% of PAAT responses were given in Spanish and the remainder in English. To measure internal consistency, alpha coefficients, reflecting the degree of reliability among items of a scale in terms of overlapping variance, were calculated. The formula used in this case is a generalization of Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 for dichotomous items. (Veldman, 1967) Coefficient alpha for the total PAAT for the PACE sample was relatively high at .76.

Twenty-three items were revised on the basis of feedback from the PACE staff regarding parents' questions about item meaning. Most item revision was a matter of phrasing (15 items) or a change of one word (9 items). Five item revisions involved changes in meaning and three changes in directionality occurred. Subsequent item revision followed statistical analysis, e.g.,

items having a low correlation with the total scale ($r < .20$) were removed. Items were placed in different subsets if the correlation between the item and subset was low ($r < .20$) or if the correlation between the item and total scale was higher than that between the item and subset. The worth of the procedure was confirmed in the 1975 item analysis of 114 PACE responses which showed that 90% of item-subset correlations were higher than item-total correlations. With the exception of four items, item-subset correlations were .25 to .63.

Throughout this discussion, the five subdivisions of PAAT items have been deliberately referred to as subsets rather than as empirically established and independent subscales. While the PAAT subsets isolate and delimit specific aspects of parent-child interaction to which curriculum may be directed, no claim is made concerning whether a difference in subset scores is genuine or the result of measurement error. Diagnostic judgements about individuals are peculiarly subject to measurement error. (Thorndike, 1973) Furthermore, the parenting variables measured on the PAAT are conceptualized as interrelated rather than as empirically separate dimensions of behavior. The subsets are a conceptual convenience that are pragmatically useful for guidance in working with parents since they provide a framework for grouping items into areas of "parenting" that provide emphasis for the curriculum.

The internal reliability of the total Form B scale was .76 and .80 when administered to 260 low-income parents of four-year-old children participating in compensatory education programs and .88 when administered to 30 largely middle-class intact families. (Slaughter, 1973-74; Elmquist, 1975) In a study of 30 intact Mexican-American families with preschool sons, Johnson (1975) obtained an alpha coefficient of .76. Hill (1976), in studying child rearing beliefs of 140 Hopi and Navajo parents, obtained alpha coefficients

of .72 and .70 respectively. The present study, involving a sample of 114 mothers of second-grade children from intact homes, yielded an alpha of .83. The reliability of subsets was lower, as expected, since the size of coefficient alpha is directly related to the number of items.

In a validation study of the PAAT, Johnson (1975) compared the expressed and observed behaviors of 30 intact Mexican families. Parent behaviors were observed relating to 38 of the items and were consistent with PAAT responses 66% of the time. Parents were more consistent (at least 70%) in creativity, frustration and control than in play (58%) and teaching-learning (59%).

Statistical Analysis: In the current investigation, the possible effects of, first, ethnic background and, second, socioeconomic status on mothers' subset and total PAAT scores were analyzed utilizing an analysis of variance for both variables. Mean scores on subsets (Creativity, Frustration, Control, Play, Teaching-Learning) and total PAAT scores for the entire group were obtained for the three ethnic groups and three socioeconomic status (SES) levels, each performed independently. Because of the small number of subjects, ethnic differences within a single SES group were not analyzed.

In instances where significance was found at the .05 level, the Scheffé test was performed to identify the source of significance among groups. For those subsets in which significant difference was found by the Scheffé, a Chi-square method was utilized to identify those items which were significantly responsible for the variance among Anglo, Black and Mexican-American mothers as well as for the upper, middle and lower socioeconomic groups.

Limitations of the Study: Research findings regarding ethnic differences in family characteristics are often complicated by socioeconomic status differences within groups. Indeed it is often difficult to know whether any specific difference is due to ethnicity or socioeconomic status (SES). For

instance, a recent study of ethnic differences among care givers in day care homes concluded that results for ethnicity could be due to differences in education rather than differences in culture. (Hawkins, 1979) Furthermore, status distinctions, e.g., low, middle, high SES, may not be strictly comparable across ethnic groups. This is especially true when comparing minority and dominant groups. Vander Zanden (1963) suggests that ethnicity and SES be kept conceptually separate when trying to understand their interrelationships because "...members of a minority group who achieve mobility into a higher class are not accorded many of the benefits bestowed upon members of the dominant group of the equivalent class." In this present study ethnic differences and SES differences are reported separately with the caveat that differences attributed to ethnicity may be the result of SES differences as well.

RESULTS

Effect of Family Ethnic Background: Table 2 shows that mothers' mean scores on the PAAT varied as a function of ethnic background. Significant differences were found among Anglos, Blacks and Mexican-Americans on all PAAT subsets except the frustration subset. The major source of variance among the three ethnic groups was that between Anglo and Black mothers, with Anglos consistently deriving the highest mean scores on the Control, Creativity, Play and Teaching-Learning subsets and Blacks obtaining the lowest scores. No significant differences were found either between the responses of Anglos and Mexican-Americans or between the responses of Blacks and Mexican-Americans on any among the five subsets or on the total PAAT. Consequently, the Scheffé test was not performed on data relating to Mexican-American mothers.

TABLE 2

PAAT Mean Scores as a Function of Family Ethnic Background

Subsets	Ethnic Groups			
	Anglos	Blacks	Mexican-Americans	p
n =	52	31	31	
Creativity	26.46	24.74	25.29	.0082
Frustration	27.33	27.13	26.39	.2708
Control	27.60	24.64	25.81	.0004
Play	30.63	28.81	29.90	.0357
Teaching-Learning	30.96	28.77	29.87	.0139
Total	142.98	134.10	137.26	.0018

The most pronounced differences among ethnic groups was found in the area of control, with Blacks exhibiting significantly more need to direct their children's behavior than did either Mexican-American or Anglo mothers. An analysis of Control subset items shows that significant differences between Blacks and Anglos were present on five out of the ten items which composed the subset.

According to Table 3, Blacks, to a much greater extent than Anglos, preferred playing games governed by rules with their children as opposed to make-believe play. Black parents were less likely to approve of children dominating the conversation and were more restrictive in the topics children were allowed to talk about. Black mothers, more than Anglos, experienced feelings of frustration when they could not answer their children's questions.

TABLE 3

Chi Square Values for Significant Control Subset Items Including Percent of Desirable and Undesirable Responses Given by Anglo and Black Mothers

Item	Ethnic Group	Undesirable	Desirable	Chi Square[a]
8. I want my child to say more than I do when we talk.	Anglos	26.9%	73.1%	9.85**
	Blacks	64.5%	35.5%	
13. There are some things I just don't want my child to talk about.	Anglos	11.5%	88.5%	8.52**
	Blacks	41.9%	58.1%	
28. When at play with my child, I prefer games that have rules rather than the make-believe kind of play.	Anglos	19.2%	80.8%	22.26**
	Blacks	74.2%	25.8%	
43. I feel unhappy when I don't know an answer to my child's questions.	Anglos	42.3%	57.7%	6.72**
	Blacks	74.2%	25.8%	
48. It's all right for my child to have secrets from me.	Anglos	17.3%	82.7%	6.20*
	Blacks	45.2%	54.8%	

a df = 1

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .01 level.

The two ethnic groups differed significantly on one remaining Control item with Blacks split fairly evenly in their willingness to tolerate children having secrets from them while 82.7% of the Anglos expressed acceptance in this area.

The data in Table 4 suggest that the greatest source of variance between responses of Anglo and Black mothers relative to the PAAT Creativity subset were items 6 and 41 ($p < .05$). The meaning of item 6 may be different to both groups. While Anglos were quite tolerant and supportive of children's creative stories, Black mothers interpreted the statement "I like my child

to make up stories," to mean telling lies rather than creating imaginative tales.

TABLE 4

Chi Square Values for Significant Subset Items Including Percent of Desirable and Undesirable Responses Given by Anglo and Black Mothers

Item	Ethnic Group	Undesirable	Desirable	Chi Square
6. I like my child to make up stories.	Anglos	21.2%	78.8%	5.49*
	Blacks	48.4%	51.6%	
41. My child wants to play too long at one time.	Anglos	28.8%	71.2%	4.50*
	Blacks	54.8%	45.2%	
44. I imitate my child's speech when we play so that the child understands.	Anglos	0.0%	100.0%	22.78*
	Blacks	41.9%	58.1%	
20. It is difficult for me to think of things to say to my child during play.	Anglos	7.7%	92.3%	5.18*
	Blacks	29.0%	71.0%	
25. When I play with my child, I feel the need to talk like a child.	Anglos	3.8%	96.2%	5.25*
	Blacks	22.6%	77.4%	

Note: df = 1 * Significant at the .05 level.

The comparison of the responses of Anglos and Blacks to the ten items of the Play subset revealed that a single item (44) constituted the major source of variance between the two ethnic groups. While many Black mothers (41.9%) felt it necessary to imitate their children's speech while interacting with them, 100% of the Anglo mothers did not consider it important to change their own way of speaking in order to facilitate communication between themselves and their children.

The degree of difficulty mothers seem to experience in communicating with their children seems to be, in part, a function of ethnicity. This was again made evident in the responses mothers gave concerning how they perceived their own ability to facilitate their children's learning. As seen in items 20 and 25 many Black mothers felt that it was necessary to imitate their children's speech in order to communicate with them at play. Their responses to the PAAT also indicated feelings of inadequacy regarding their ability to even converse with children in a play setting.

Effect of Family Socioeconomic Level: Table 5 summarizes the analysis of variance of mothers' PAAT mean scores as a function of socioeconomic level. Significant differences between upper, middle and lower-class mothers were present on all PAAT subsets as well as on the total PAAT. The major source of variance in all areas was that between the upper and lower-class, with upper-class mothers obtaining the highest mean scores and lower-class mothers the lowest scores on all 5 subsets and on the total. The scores of middle-class mothers consistently fell between those of the two other groups on all dimensions.

The greatest differences among subjects in the three socioeconomic groups could be found in mothers' feelings regarding control of their children's behavior. A multiple comparison of means indicated that significant differences were present between upper and lower-class mothers ($p < .01$). In addition, significant differences were found between middle and lower-class ($p < .01$) and between upper and middle-class mothers ($p < .05$) on the control dimension. It appears that the variance among socioeconomic groups was greater than the variance among ethnic groups in terms of parental need for control.

TABLE 5

PAAT Mean Scores as a Function of Socioeconomic Level

Subset	Socioeconomic Groups			
	Upper Class	Middle Class	Lower Class	p
n =	46	38	30	
Creativity	26.52	25.55	24.53	.0043
Frustration	27.50	27.24	26.00	.0369
Control	28.11	26.29	23.57	.0000
Play	30.76	30.24	28.30	.0029
Teaching-Learning	31.59	30.00	27.83	.0000
Total	144.48	139.32	130.23	.0000

An inspection of Table 6, displaying differences between upper and lower-class mothers, shows that seven out of the ten Control items contributed to the significant variance. Lower-class mothers, on all seven items, revealed a desire for greater control over their children's behavior than did upper-class groups. For example, consider anger toward a playmate. Lower-class mothers (80%) were unable to tolerate exhibitions of anger, feeling that play should be stopped as a result of such outbursts. The second item where the most striking difference occurred deals with the rights of children to have secrets from parents. Upper-class responses (84.8%) showed these mothers to be more willing than the lower-class mothers (43.3%) to make allowances for a child's private thoughts.

The discrepancy between middle and lower-class mothers regarding control could be equally attributed to the following items ($p < .05$): (3) It is all

TABLE 6

Chi Square Values for Significant Control Subset Items Including Percent of Desirable and Undesirable Responses Given by Upper- and Lower-Class Mothers

Item	Socioeconomic Group	Undesirable	Desirable	Chi Square[a]
3. It is all right for my child to disagree with me.	Upper	4.3%	95.7%	6.08*
	Lower	26.7%	73.3%	
8. I want my child to say more than I do when we talk.	Upper	30.4%	69.6%	8.23**
	Lower	66.7%	33.3%	
13. There are some things I just don't want my child to talk about.	Upper	17.4%	82.6%	4.88*
	Lower	43.3%	56.7%	
33. I feel play must be stopped when my child becomes angry at a playmate.	Upper	30.4%	69.6%	15.92**
	Lower	80.0%	20.0%	
38. I provide chances for my child to make up his own mind about a lot of things.	Upper	2.2%	97.8%	9.99**
	Lower	30.0%	70.0%	
43. I feel unhappy when I don't know an answer to my child's questions.	Upper	41.3%	58.7%	9.55**
	Lower	80.0%	20.0%	
48. It's all right for my child to have secrets from me.	Upper	15.2%	84.8%	12.58**
	Lower	56.7%	43.3%	

a df = 1

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .005 level.

right for my child to disagree with me; (8) I want my child to say more than I do when we talk; (33) I feel play must be stopped when my child becomes angry at a playmate; and (38) I provide chances for my child to make up his own mind about a lot of things. The Control subset was the only dimension where significant variance was found between upper and middle-class groups. However, an item analysis failed to reveal specific items to which this variance could be attributed.

Substantive differences were identified between the three socioeconomic groups in respect to mothers' perceptions of themselves as teachers of their children. Although the greatest differences were found between upper and lower-class subjects ($p < .01$), significance was also recorded between the responses of middle and lower-class mothers ($p < .05$). Table 7 reveals that while four items contributed to the variance between upper and lower-class, item 20 ($p < .001$) which dealt with talking to children, was the greatest contributor. This same item was the single question ($p < .005$) responsible for differences between middle and lower-class mothers' self perceptions of themselves as teachers. Lower-class mothers, it was indicated, tended to have the greatest difficulty carrying on conversations with children, followed by middle and then by upper-class mothers who expressed the least difficulty of all.

TABLE 7

Chi Square Values for Significant Teaching-Learning Subset Items Including Percent of Desirable and Undesirable Responses Given by Upper- and Lower-Class Mothers

Item	Socioeconomic Group	Undesirable	Desirable	Chi Square
15. It is all right for my child to have a make-believe friend.	Upper	19.6%	80.4%	3.90*
	Lower	43.3%	56.7%	
20. It is difficult for me to think of things to say to my child during play.	Upper	6.5%	93.5%	10.82**
	Lower	40.0%	60.0%	
40. I scold my child when he doesn't learn.	Upper	10.9%	89.1%	8.87**
	Lower	43.3%	56.7%	
50. If we play whenever my child wants to, not much learning will take place.	Upper	21.7%	78.3%	8.21**
	Lower	56.7%	43.3%	

Note: df = 1

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .005 level.

The Play subset further differentiated between upper and lower-class mothers ($p < .01$) and between middle and lower-class mothers ($p < .05$).

Table 8 reveals that, of the three items contributing to variance between upper and lower-class, item 44 focusing on imitation by mothers of their child's speech, contributed most appreciably to this variance ($p < .0005$). Forty per cent of the lower-class felt it necessary to speak like their children while only 4.3% of the upper-class felt childlike speech essential to communication.

TABLE 8

Chi Square Values for Significant Play Subset Items Including Percent of Desirable and Undesirable Responses Given by Upper- and Lower-Class Mothers

Item	Socioeconomic Group	Undesirable	Desirable	Chi Square
14. If I spend a lot of time playing with my child, he will disobey me more often.	Upper	6.5%	93.5%	4.44*
	Lower	26.7%	73.3%	
39. It is difficult for me to stay interested when playing with my child.	Upper	26.1%	73.9%	4.68*
	Lower	53.3%	46.7%	
44. I imitate my child's speech when we play so that the child understands.	Upper	4.3%	95.7%	13.08**
	Lower	40.0%	60.0%	

Note: df = 1

* Significant at the .05 level.
** Significant at the .0005 level.

Items 39 and 44, which differentiated between upper and lower-class groups also constituted the major source of variance between middle and lower-class mothers' responses on the Play subset. While only 18.4% of the middle-class mothers expressed difficulty staying interested in playing with their children, 53.3% of the lower-class regarded this as a problem.

Analysis of the two remaining PAAT subsets of Creativity and Frustration, (not presented in tabular form), reveal further significant variance between the responses of upper and lower-class subjects. Lower-class mothers tended to feel, more than upper-class, that their children wanted to play too long at one time. Two items equally accounted ($p < .05$) for variance between upper and lower socioeconomic groups on the Frustration subset. On item 22, relating to fighting, lower-class mothers were more likely to punish their children than were upper-class. On item 37 dealing with the number of toys children were permitted to take out, lower-class mothers were more tolerant than upper-class of children taking out as many as they wished. Responses on this item marked the first instance in the current investigation when lower-class mothers agreed more than upper-class with child development research findings.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has identified significant differences existing between mothers as a function of ethnic background and/or socioeconomic level.

Significant differences were found between Anglo and Black mothers on four of the five PAAT subsets (Control, Creativity, Play and Teaching-Learning) and on the total PAAT, with Anglo responses tending to be more consistent with the values promoted in child development research than those of Blacks. No significant differences were found either between Anglos and Mexican-Americans or between Mexican-Americans and Blacks.

Among the upper, middle and lower socioeconomic groups, significant differences were found on all five PAAT subsets and on the total PAAT. The major source of variance was that between upper and lower-class mothers, with upper-class responses tending to be more consistent with child development research than those of lower-class. Significant variance on the Control,

Play and Teaching-Learning subsets and on the total PAAT was also attributable to differences between middle and lower-class subjects. The Control subset marked the single source of significant variance between upper and middle-class mothers.

Some of these differences in the normative expectations of parents, due to ethnicity and/or SES, may relate to functional aspects of Black or lower SES life. For instance, in some environments parents may feel it unsafe for children to have secrets and there may be a need to caution children about talking about family matters. However, others clearly signal a need for parent education in understanding child growth and learning. For instance, the desire for extensive control of childrens' language and behavior may severely limit their exploratory behavior and suppress creative and intellectual development.

By seeking to control what children say and when they say it, parents make it harder for children to learn to express their thoughts freely. By removing children from play when fights arise, parents take away opportunities to help children understand how to use words, instead of fists, to express anger throughout their lives. By failing to give children chances to make choices, parents inhibit growth toward responsibility and independence. By hesitating to participate in imaginative play, parents show children that, although play is their most natural means of both mental and emotional catharsis, it is not valued by the most important people in children's lives. At the same time, children receive the message that they are not accepted by their parents simply for being themselves and for doing what they do best -- playing.

Some of the items such as wanting to answer all of a child's questions or scolding a child for not learning indicated some lack of self-confidence

in Black and/or lower SES mothers regarding the learning process and the viability of their role as teachers. Examination of the data regarding parents perceptions of themselves as play partners also indicate the same lack of confidence.

The ethnic and SES differences in parental expectations and values described here indicate areas of potential conflict between various parent groups and program staff regarding normative goals for early childhood programs. While some of these are the result of functional differences in lifestyle and life conditions, many are open to reassessment by parent groups who become interested in optimizing their children's intellectual and creative growth.

In the final analysis, program planning must give first consideration to the family. To focus upon specific definable parental behaviors and attitudes is to go beyond ethnic, socioeconomic, or other group differences to treat parents as individuals. While some parental behaviors may not promote children's development, it is essential that parents be respected for their values, honored for their strengths and supported while they are being encouraged to modify or change their childrearing understandings and behavior.

Acceptance of the individuality of each family through careful analysis of family strengths and needs will aid parents to become aware of the specific behavior they exhibit toward children and how these behaviors affect their children, as well as encouraging them to form a partnership with school to insure the greatest possible development in all facets of their children's lives. Similarly, awareness of ethnic and social class differences in parents' normative expectations will allow early childhood educators to plan and implement programs that better meet the needs of children and their families.

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